

WYCOMBE Wanderers' title hopes, renewed after two handsome victories last week, suffered a set-back on Saturday when the Blues crashed 1-0 at Croydon in the Rothmans Isthmian League.

In one of their poorest displays of the season, Wanderers gave a lifeless performance that brought an end to their unbeaten

By STUART EARP Croydon 1, Wycombe Wanderers 0

run under manager John Reardon.

Those 3-0 and 4-0 home victories over Sutton and Ilford last week pushed Wycombe into second place and started everyone wondering about the title. Although they stay second after Dagenham's home draw with Woking, the Blues must know full well that they have no chance of the championship if they continue to produce this type of football.

The danger signs were

there from the start. The opposition, the ground, the conditions all pointed to a difficult game that would test Wycombe's recent form to its limits. Croydon are an ordinary outfit but their greatest asset is their work rate which was a good deal higher than Wycombe's on Saturday.

I can't imagine Croydon enjoy playing at the Arena every week. A running track surrounds the pitch which robs any atmosphere as the

crowd are situated some 15-20 yards from the play. Every time the ball goes into touch there is a 30-second wait or more to retrieve the ball. Needless to say, the home side made the most of that when they were trying to hold on to their one goal lead.

The pitch itself left a lot to be desired and the poor surface made it difficult for the players to show any degree of control.

All these factors must be taken

into account but, in the end, Wycombe can blame only

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themselves for the loss of three vital league points. Man for man, their attacking flair but they were a better side than Croydon but they just could not put pressure on the Croydon defence in which Adrian Hill was outstanding. Too often the Blues still produced enough goalscorers to find themselves second to the ball, lacking the fight and aggression, but these were all wasted, of the home side.

Croydon knew only too well the penalty of allowing their opponents time and space in which to play. They had been well beaten 3-0 earlier in the season at Loakes Park. It was their intention to deny Wanderers those commodities on Saturday and, as they succeeded. Chasing hard, Howard Kettleborough saw a header well saved by Dave Cobb and the same player nodded over the top from Bob Davies's long drive. It was their intention to deny Wanderers those commodities on Saturday and, as they succeeded. Chasing hard, Evans replaced the ineffective

Dylan who had a great chance to equalise when Birdseye caught Croydon napping with a quick free-kick. His perfectly flighted pass flew over the defence to Birdseye standing out as their best performer, and John Priestley not far behind.

Steve Hill replaced Dylan Evans from the side that beat Ilford in mid-week and, for missing an open goal in the Wycombe were soon under pressure. Goalkeeper Johnstone beat Cobb and fell nicely to Maskell looked far from safe Phillips but he headed over the with a couple of early corners from close range. There was only one more opportunity for the Blues to take a Croydon's offside trap often caught out the Blues from free kick.

Conditions, including an awkward wind, meant a left and his long cross fell frustrating 45 minutes for the fans with neither side ever getting the ball under control with any consistency. There were only two half chances before the break, Maskell saving well from Brian Wooley and Mick Hollifield being tackled just as he was about to shoot. Apart from that, there were few dangerous moments in the penalty areas.

The second half brought a little more excitement but the standard of play was again overall. Croydon were ahead after only four minutes of the new period with a beautifully taken goal by Cliff Gould.

A long ball upfield saw Gould and Keith Mead give chase and Gould used his extra speed to outrun the Wycombe centre-back. Maskell came out half way but Gould's lob was perfectly placed and bounced into the net.

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; P. Birdseye, K. Mead, A. Phillips, B. Davies, G. Mackenzie, J. Priestley, M. Hollifield, S. Hill (sub) D. Evans (62 min), H. Kettleborough, I. Pearson.

CROYDON: D. Cobb, K. Roots, A. Hill, R. Goncalves, K. Groves, A. Prime, F. Sterling, B. Wooley, M. O'Toole, C. Gould, C. Hall, Sub S. Delaney (not used).

Referee: E. Carter
Half-time: 0-0; **Goalscorer:** 'Gould (45).